

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., cheered today's U.S. Supreme Court ruling abolishing the death penalty for juvenile offenders. "It was a giant step toward a more civilized and humane way of handling the uncivilized and inhumane practice of capital punishment. On this issue, the U.S. has now left the company of such nations as Iran, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and China. I welcome the U.S. to the civilized world," Jackson said.

"In recent years, several studies have shown that there are many problems with the death penalty across the nation," Jackson said. "People are condemned more often when their attorney is inexperienced, if they live in a rural area, or if the victim is white. People are condemned based on the testimony of a jailhouse informant, an accomplice, or a single eyewitness—all notoriously fallible. People can be sentenced to death if police and prosecutors are ambitious, or the case in question puts them under intense political pressure and public outrage. The mentally retarded have been executed, and the system shows little or no compassion for a defendant who has a history of being abused. At least now, the high court has taken those under 18 off of that questionable list."

Jackson is a long-time opponent of the death penalty. For the past five years, he has called for an end to capital punishment, and short of that, a moratorium.

"In many instances new technology makes it possible for the criminal justice system to definitively answer questions of guilt or innocence without relying on eyewitness testimony or circumstantial evidence," Jackson said. "The same way new technology helped catch the BTK suspect in Kansas, it can make sure that those accused and convicted of capital offenses get every opportunity to prove their guilt or innocence."

"I continue to call for a minimum 7-year national moratorium on all executions until all death row inmates get the chance to explore potentially exculpatory DNA and similar evidence. We must also standardize procedures for using DNA and similar evidence in capital cases as a way of decreasing the possibility that innocent people of any age will end up on death row," Jackson concluded.